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SUBJECT: DAILY SUMMARY OF JAPANESE PRESS 10/22/08

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ARTICLES:

(1) Kyodo News poll on Aso cabinet, political parties

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Page 2) (Full)
October 20, 2008

Questions & Answers

(Figures shown in percentage. Parentheses denote the results of the last survey conducted Sept. 24-25.)

Q: Do you support the Aso cabinet?

Yes 42.5 (48.6)

No 39.0 (32.9)

Don't know (D/K) + no answer (N/A) 18.5 (18.5)

Q: (Only for those who answered "yes" to the previous question)

What's the primary reason for your approval of the Aso cabinet? Pick only one from among those listed below.

The prime minister is trustworthy 19.6 (15.4)

Because it's a coalition cabinet of the Liberal Democratic Party and the New Komeito 6.1 (4.9)

The prime minister has leadership ability 9.6 (16.6)

Something can be expected of its economic policies 14.5 (17.6)

Something can be expected of its foreign policies 3.7 (1.9)

Something can be expected of its political reforms 1.9 (4.8)

Something can be expected of its tax reforms 1.8 (1.7)

Something can be expected of its administrative reforms 3.8 (1.7)

There's no other appropriate person (for prime minister) 37.6 (31.9)

Other answers (O/A) 0.3 (1.8)

D/K+N/A 1.1 (1.7)

Q: (Only for those who answered "no" to the first question) What's

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the primary reason for your disapproval of the Aso cabinet? Pick only one from among those listed below.

The prime minister is untrustworthy 8.5 (11.4)

Because it's a coalition cabinet of the Liberal Democratic Party and the New Komeito 16.2 (20.8)

The prime minister lacks leadership ability 5.9 (5.3)

Nothing can be expected of its economic policies 22.6 (14.9)

Nothing can be expected of its foreign policies 4.2 (1.2)

Nothing can be expected of its political reforms 14.8 (13.6)

Nothing can be expected of its tax reforms 3.9 (5.3)

Nothing can be expected of its administrative reforms 6.9 (8.7)

Don't like the prime minister's personal character 13.2 (14.0)

O/A 2.5 (2.2)

D/K+N/A 1.3 (2.6)

Q: The fiscal 2008 supplementary budget has passed the Diet. There is an opinion saying the government should further issue deficit-covering bonds and compile a large-scale extra budget. Do you support the idea of issuing deficit-covering bonds to boost the nation's economy?

Yes 24.2

No 56.2

D/K+N/A 19.6

Q: What do you think about the new healthcare insurance system for those aged 75 and over?

Call off the new system and restore the original system and then introduce a new system 46.6

Maintain the current system 11.1

D/K+N/A 2.8

Q: The House of Representatives' current membership is up until September next year. When would you like an election to be held for the House of Representatives?

November 31.6

At the end of this year or at the beginning of next year 5.2

Around spring after the budget for next fiscal year has passed the Diet 29.8

Before the term expires in September next year 26.6

D/K+N/A 6.8

Q: What do you consider when voting in the next election for the House of Representatives? Pick only one.

Social security, such as pension and healthcare systems 33.0
Economic measures, job security 26.5
Fiscal reconstruction, tax reform 17.5
Civil service reform 8.7
Diplomacy, national security 3.1
Politics and money 8.3
O/A 0.2
D/K+N/A 2.7

Q: Would you like the present LDP-led coalition government to continue, or would you otherwise like it to be replaced with a DPJ-led coalition government?

LDP-led coalition government 38.3 (38.1)

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DPJ-led coalition government 43.0 (43.8)
D/K+N/A 18.7 (18.1)

Q: Which political party are you going to vote for in the next House of Representatives election in your proportional representation bloc?

Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) 32.7 (34.9)
Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ or Minshuto) 35.9 (34.8)
New Komeito (NK) 5.0 (5.7)
Japanese Communist Party (JCP) 3.2 (2.7)
Social Democratic Party (SDP or Shaminto) 1.5 (1.2)
People's New Party (PNP or Kokumin Shinto) 0.8 (0.4)
Reform Club (RC or Kaikaku Kurabu) 0.2
New Party Nippon (NPN or Shinto Nippon) 0.2 (0.2)
Other political parties, groups --- (---)
D/K+N/A 20.5 (20.1)

Q: When comparing Prime Minister Taro Aso and DPJ President Ichiro Ozawa, which one do you think is more appropriate for prime minister?

Taro Aso 52.3 (53.9)
Ichiro Ozawa 27.2 (29.4)
D/K+N/A 20.5 (16.7)

Q: Which political party do you support?

Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) 36.2 (37.0)
Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ or Minshuto) 26.8 (28.3)
New Komeito (NK) 4.7 (4.7)
Japanese Communist Party (JCP) 2.7 (2.4)
Social Democratic Party (SDP or Shaminto) 1.1 (1.2)
People's New Party (PNP or Kokumin Shinto) 0.4 (0.3)
Reform Club (RC or Kaikaku Kurabu) 0.1
New Party Nippon (NPN or Shinto Nippon) 0.1 (0.2)
Other political parties, groups --- (---)
None 24.4 (23.1)
D/K+N/A 3.5 (2.8)

Polling methodology: The survey was conducted Oct. 18-19 across the nation by Kyodo News Service on a computer-aided random digit dialing (RDD) basis. Among randomly generated telephone numbers, those actually for household use with one or more eligible voters totaled 1,474. Answers were obtained from 1,030 persons.

(2) Yomiuri-Waseda poll on political mindset: Public wavering over choice for government

YOMIURI (Page 15) (Full)
October 19, 2008

The Yomiuri Shimbun and Waseda University conducted a joint public opinion survey across the nation, and the survey found that the nation's voting population was in a growing fret over politics now. People were feeling uneasy or disappointed in their images of the

two major political parties, the ruling Liberal Democratic Party and the leading opposition Democratic Party of Japan (Minshuto). The voter appears unable to make a positive choice over whether to entrust the LDP or the DPJ with the future of Japan.

Questions & Answers

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(Figures shown in percentage)

Q: Do you think it's all right to entrust the DPJ with the reins of government?

Yes 35.5
Somewhat think so 22.7
Don't very much think so 18.4
No 19.9
No answer (N/A) 3.5

Q: Do you look forward to the LDP in the future? How about the DPJ?

LDP DPJ
Yes 20.5 20.0
Somewhat yes 28.0 30.1
Not very much 29.8 30.5
No 19.8 17.1
N/A 1.9 2.2

Q: Do you feel uneasy about the LDP in the future? How about the DPJ?

LDP DPJ
Yes 39.5 32.5
Somewhat yes 42.6 42.0
Not very much 10.8 15.2
No 5.1 6.3
N/A 2.0 4.0

Q: Are you satisfied with the LDP in the past? How about the DPJ?

LDP DPJ
Yes 3.4 1.7
Somewhat yes 16.9 14.9
Not very much 39.0 41.3
No 39.4 37.5
N/A 1.3 4.5

Q: Are you disappointed at the LDP in the past? How about the DPJ?

LDP DPJ
Yes 31.0 20.4
Somewhat yes 37.7 29.5
Not very much 19.2 30.1
No 9.5 12.6
N/A 2.7 7.4

Q: Do you think the LDP is competent to hold the reins of government? How about the DPJ?

LDP DPJ
Yes 28.4 11.6
Somewhat yes 38.7 34.4
Not very much 16.6 26.9
No 12.5 20.5
N/A 3.9 6.6

Q: What's your impression of Prime Minister Aso?

Good 17.6
Good to a certain degree 39.4

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Bad to a certain degree 26.5
Bad 9.5

N/A 7.0

Q: What's your impression of DPJ President Ozawa?

Good 7.9

Good to a certain degree 26.7

Bad to a certain degree 37.1

Bad 21.7

N/A 6.6

Q: When comparing Prime Minister Aso and DPJ President Ozawa, which one do you think would be more appropriate for prime minister?

Minister Aso 57.1

DPJ President Ozawa 26.2

N/A 16.6

Q: Are you satisfied with the next election for the House of Representatives?

Very interested 46.3

Somewhat interested 34.1

Not very interested 14.9

Not interested at all 4.2

N/A 0.4

Q: Which political party are you going to vote for in the next election for the House of Representatives in your proportional representation bloc?

Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) 31.6

Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ or Minshuto) 24.8

New Komeito (NK) 3.1

Japanese Communist Party (JCP) 2.1

Social Democratic Party (SDP or Shaminto) 1.6

People's New Party (PNP or Kokumin Shinto) 0.4

Reform Club (RC or Kaikaku Kurabu) ---

New Party Nippon (NPN or Shinto Nippon) 0.1

Other political parties 0.1

Undecided 35.8

N/A 0.4

Q: Would you like an LDP-led coalition government to come into office after the next election for the House of Representatives, or would you otherwise like a DPJ-led coalition government?

LDP-led coalition government 47.3

DPJ-led coalition government 36.1

Other answers (O/A) 1.1

N/A 15.4

Q: What form of government do you think is most desirable to resolve issues facing Japan?

A coalition government of the LDP and the DPJ 19.6

A coalition government of opposition parties centering on the DPJ 20.9

The LDP's single-party government 9.3

The DPJ's single-party government 6.3

A coalition government centering on the LDP and the DPJ 18.7

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A new framework of government with the ruling and opposition parties realigned 12.8

O/A 0.2

N/A 12.1

Polling methodology

Date of survey: Oct. 4-5.

Subjects of survey: 3,000 persons chosen from among all eligible voters throughout the country (at 250 locations on a stratified two-stage random-sampling basis).

Method of implementation: Door-to-door visits for face-to-face interviews.

Number of valid respondents: 1,787 persons (59.6 PERCENT)

Breakdown of respondents: Male-48 PERCENT , female-52 PERCENT ;

persons in their 20s-10 PERCENT , 30s-16 PERCENT , 40s-16 PERCENT , 50s-21 PERCENT , 60s-21 PERCENT , 70 and over-17 PERCENT .

(Note) The total percentage does not become 100 PERCENT in some cases due to rounding.

(3) Editorial: Legislation to extend refueling mission; More substantive discussion sought

ASAHI (Page 3) (Full)
October 21, 2008

The Lower House panel passed legislation to extend the refueling mission by the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (MSDF) in the Indian Ocean for another year. The Upper House is likely to reject the legislation, but it will highly likely be enacted by the end of the month, with the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) agreeing to reject it promptly, so that a second vote can be held in the Lower House for swift approval by a majority vote of more than two-thirds of the members.

Probably because such a goal was foreseeable from the beginning, the two days of committee deliberations failed to have much in-depth discussion as to what steps the international community should take, or what contribution Japan should make to stabilize the situation in Afghanistan and control international terrorism.

The Lower House panel was a good opportunity to discuss recognition of the current situation and diplomacy, since the DPJ's counterproposals were also on the table. The deliberations were unsatisfactory, having spent more time on legal interpretation and the scandal at the Ministry of Defense (MOD), rather than on how to assess the current situation in Afghanistan. There was not even the slightest impression given that the two sides were having a public-relations war.

The ruling party rebutted the DPJ's argument that the refueling mission was unconstitutional. DPJ President Ozawa has long expounded his own view that the constraint placed by Article 9 of the Constitution shall not apply to an endorsement by the United Nation. The ruling party demanded an answer to a question as to whether the Self Defense Force (SDF) is allowed to use force in foreign countries with a U.N. resolution alone.

Mr. Ozawa's argument has been rejected by even lawmakers in the DPJ. The ruling party questioned the unresolved points in the argument. In the end, the DPJ avoided giving a direct answer and just stated in an abstract form that the party's legal concept is different.

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The ruling party further pointed out that the SDF can not virtually do anything if its deployment to provide aid for reconstruction is subject to a cease fire agreement, as in the DPJ's proposal.

Meanwhile, the DPJ demanded disclosure of information on the names of refueled foreign vessels and addressed the incident involving the loss of life of an MSDF member during combat training, employing a tactic to highlight the Defense Ministry's tendency to cover up problems.

The DPJ also made a proposal for the deployment of SDF ships to counter piracy off the coast of Somalia in Africa. The proposal is yet to become an official party policy, but it was probably a tactic to avoid being viewed as passive in the area of international contribution.

A question as to what role Japan should play in the war on terror actually came up, going beyond the controversy over the refueling issue. Discussion should have been seen as necessary here on the changes over the past year in the international situation, such as political instability in Pakistan that receives the most amount of refueling assistance. Why was not any effort to do so made, such as calling in a specialist to give unsworn testimony?

By what date will the bill be adopted? What view would be advantageous to use in the general election campaign? Only such

inward-looking motives were emphasized. Even though Japan has been elected to a nonpermanent seat on the U.N. Security Council starting next year, there has been too little debate from a global perspective appropriate for the country's role. We urge the Upper House to engage in more substantive discussion.

(4) Editorial - Refueling bill; DPJ's security policy swaying

SANKEI (Page 2) (Full)
October 22, 2008

A bill amending the new Antiterrorism Special Measures Law to extend the refueling mission by the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force passed the Lower House with a majority of votes from the ruling party. The Upper House begins deliberations on Oct. 22 and is expected to vote down the bill, but the Lower House will likely repass the bill into law in an overriding second vote on Oct. 30.

The worst-case scenario of unilaterally pulling out of the war on terror may be avoided, but both ruling and opposing parties should discuss the fundamental issue as to whether Japan is to only provide refueling aid and, furthermore, how Japan can be more involved in promoting peace and stability in the international community.

A bill on the Special Measure Law to support reconstruction of Afghanistan proposed by the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) was voted down with a majority of votes from the ruling coalition, the Japanese Communist Party (JCP), and the Social Democratic Party (SDP). The bill limits the deployment of the Self-Defense Force (SDF) to the area over which a conflict cessation agreement has been reached between the local government and armed groups. However, this bill can not be applied to reality, since the DPJ representative introducing the bill admitted, while giving answers in the session, that there is no such area at present. Though aiming at taking office, the DPJ fails to fulfill its responsibility of proposing a realistic counterproposal to the refueling mission

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that it opposes.

However, the DPJ proposal calls for the enactment of legislation to proactively contribute to the anti-terrorist efforts of the international community. The measure would contain an article that would allow the use of weapons "when absolutely necessary to control resistance," thus bringing Japan's restriction on the use of weapons closer to the international standard. The proposal could serve as a draft of a permanent law to respond to every situation, instead of ad hoc deployments of the SDF. The ruling party should draw on it.

Meanwhile, the discussion at the Lower House revealed the DPJ's security policy is disorganized.

DPJ President Ichiro Ozawa referred to the refueling mission at a press conference on Oct. 14, by saying "We can't cooperate (in the refueling mission) because it violates the Constitution of Japan." However, the DPJ representative introducing the bill left some room for the extension of the mission by insisting that (the refueling mission) would violate the Constitution only if it was diverted to operations in Iraq. A DPJ lawmaker who raised questions during the session said that there are various opinions in the DPJ about the propriety of the refueling mission.

In addition, following Mr. Ozawa's statement that the U.N. peace-keeping activities ultimately provide collateral to Japan's security, Prime Minister Taro Aso criticized his assertion by saying that a national security can not be entrusted to the U.N., which is now influenced by the policies of a few countries. Mr. Ozawa's U.N.-supremacy view is debatable even in the DPJ. This indicates the party discussion on the security policy, the foundation of a nation, is half-baked.

Mr. Ozawa should make detailed explanations at debate among party leaders and on other occasions, otherwise he will not increase the sense of trust in his party.

(5) Preparation for Nov. 30 Lower House election underway: Premier

hesitant to dissolve Lower House due to financial crisis, stressing priority of economic stimulus measures

YOMIURI (Page 4) (Abridged slightly)
October 22, 2008

Prime Minister Aso is becoming nervous about the worsening economic situation in the wake of the financial crisis gripping the U.S. and Europe. He is making preparations with a scenario of dissolving the Lower House as early as the end of this month, officially announcing the election on November 18 and holding it on the 30th. However, he appears to be increasingly concerned that the economic situation would hurt the ruling camp in the election. Some observers believe the prime minister wants to put off the Lower House election because of the financial crisis.

Calls for postponing election among aides

The observation that the prime minister is hesitant about dissolving the Lower House at the end of this month spread across political circles on October 20. He attended the birthday party for the Empress that day. During the party, he told another participant, a lawmaker who is close to him: "When the U.S. economy is shaky, Japan must support the global economy. There will be a political vacuum in

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the U.S. between the presidential election on November 4 and the inauguration of the new president in January." The rumor that the Lower House election might not be held until after New Year's was spread around through a person who heard this remark.

The prime minister again referred to the political vacuum that is expected to occur in the U.S. at a meeting of the Taro-kai - a group of lawmakers close to him, such as Internal Affairs Minister Kunio Hatoyama. They met on the evening of the 20th. He reportedly said, "The global economy will worsen without fail. We must deal with this problem now."

The prime minister, who is sensitive to the movements of economic indexes, ordered his secretary to tell him stock price movements on the Tokyo Stock Exchange every 30 minutes, even during Diet deliberations. One aide revealed: "Since the prime minister has many supporters among small to medium-sized company managers, he is collecting information through his own channels. It appears that he has a heightened sense of crisis that the real economy is worsening at a pace faster than expected."

There is a view that another reason that the prime minister is hesitant about dissolving the Lower House is that many of his aides at the Kantei are urging him to delay the election. As a matter of fact, Finance Minister and State Minister for Financial Policy Nakagawa and Vice Election Committee Chairman Suga during a dinner with the prime minister said, "Now is not the time for dissolving the Lower House."

Going round and round in circles

Chances are that if the prime minister postpones the expected Nov. 30 Lower House election option to a later date, he might become effectively unable to exercise his right to dissolve the Lower House.

A Lower House election in December would hamper the annual tax code revision and the compilation of the fiscal 2009 budget. If it is held at year's end or early next year, the start of budget deliberations in the regular Diet session early next year could slip to a later date, necessitating the compilation of a stopgap budget. Should that occur, Prime Minister Aso would come under fire as having failed to live up to his slogan that he attaches importance to the economy. If he postpones the election to a date after Nov. 30, he would be unable to dissolve the Lower House until the fiscal 2009 budget is approved next spring. In that case, the prime minister would have no leverage over the political situation, such as using his right to dissolve the Lower House, according to a senior member of the Ibuki faction.

The DPJ is now cooperative toward his steering of the Diet in pursuit of dissolution of the Lower House. However, it is likely to shift to a confrontational stance if Aso puts off the Nov. 30 scenario. Conflict between the LDP and the New Komeito is also certain to increase, since the coalition partner is seeking an early dissolution of the Diet.

The ruling parties want to use an additional economic stimulus package as their sales point in campaign for the next Lower House election. The package will be filled with pork-barrel largesse, an early dissolution of the Lower House having been taken into consideration. As such, there is concern that if the year-end annual

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tax code revision and the compilation of the fiscal 2009 budget start and discussions on specific funding sources begin, there would appear discrepancies with the government's previous policy.

A deep-rooted view is that since the economy is expected to worsen further, delaying the timing of dissolution of the Lower House would be disadvantageous to the ruling camp. LDP Secretary General Hosoda and Mikio Aoki, former chairman of the LDP caucus in the Upper House, stand firm on their projection that in the end, the prime minister will reach a decision that he has no choice but to hold the election on November 30.

(6) Prime Minister Aso on the comfort-women issue: The government will follow the Kono Statement

Mainichi (Internet ed.) (Full)
October 15, 2008

Prime Minister Taro Aso was asked in the Upper House Budget Committee on Oct. 15 about the Kono Statement of 1993 that recognizes and apologizes for the former Japanese army's involvement in the so-called comfort-women issue. He said, "The basic position of the government today, as well, follows the (Kono) Statement." He was replying to Democratic Socialist Party head Miho Fukushima.

(7) Where will Prime Minister Aso go tonight? Eats at exclusive restaurants and drinks at exclusive private bars

ASAHI (Page 4) (Abridged slightly)
October 22, 2008

Prime Minister Taro Aso will mark one month in office on the 24th. The 68-year-old prime minister has gone almost every night to restaurants and bars in hotels. He ends his day at a hotel bar. He is very particular in his lifestyle. However, it is unclear whom he goes along with.

Aso informally meets someone else

Aso had dinner with Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Jun Matsumoto on the 8th, 9th and 10th.

According to the prime minister's schedule on Oct. 10, Aso arrived at the Japanese restaurant Yamazato in the Hotel Okura at 7:11 p.m. to have dinner with Matsumoto; and he arrived at 10:03 p.m. at the hotel's Orchid Bar to talk with Matsumoto.

The prime minister's schedule for the night is given to reporters attached to the prime minister around the time when Aso leaves the Prime Minister's Official Residence (Kantei) after finishing his official duties. Besides Matsumoto and Aso's secretaries, those who accompanied Aso to restaurants and bars are lawmakers belonging to the Aso faction and his office staff. Aso went out nine times so far with Matsumoto, who is a Lower House member belonging to the Aso faction and a close aide to the prime minister.

What do Aso and Matsumoto talk about every night? Naturally, Aso's actions raise questions that he may be secretly meeting with somebody else. However, since he uses exclusive private bars in first-class hotels that have several entry doors, it is difficult to find out who he is with.

Those who had got together with Aso on the night when Aso reportedly met Matsumoto were found. One of them said: "So as not to be seen by reporters, I entered the hotel 40 minutes earlier than (the prime minister) and left one hour after him." Appearing on an NTV program on Oct. 12, a lawyer with close ties with Aso said: "I recently had a drink with Mr. Aso."

It was officially announced that the prime minister dined with his secretary at a Chinese restaurant in a Tokyo hotel on the night of Oct. 16. But that night, Finance Minister Shoichi Nakagawa, Minister of State for Administrative Reform Akira Amari and Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) Election Strategy Council Deputy Chairman Yoshihide Suga came out from the restaurant after Aso had left the hotel.

Past prime ministers secretly invited guests to the Kantei and met separately with other persons. Aso, however, has had meetings at night more frequently than his predecessors. One of Aso's aides said: "I am used as a dummy (in place of the people the prime minister meets)."

Rhythm is important

On October 2, Aso was seen talking cheerfully with junior lawmakers with a cigar in one hand at a restaurant on the second floor of a multitenant building in Roppongi. A lawmaker joined the gathering said: "We were talking nonsense 99 PERCENT of the time."

Is Aso trying to refresh his spirits after unwinding from his official duty? A person close to Aso said: "The prime minister is always in a state of tension. So he cannot go to sleep before he smokes a cigar at the bar."

However, Aso kept the same lifestyle when he was a cabinet minister or had no government position. Some in the LDP have criticized Aso, with one saying: "It is not good for him to go to a bar every night ahead of the general election."

A person who has known Aso for a long time said:

"He does not want to change his rhythm even since becoming prime minister. He looks back on the day at the end of a day while listening to music at the bar. This rhythm is important for him. What (the prime minister) is required are the achievements (of his job)."

Former Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori was criticized by some in the ruling camp for frequently having meetings at night. This was one of the reasons Mori lost momentum.

Number of Aso's meetings stands out

During the 28 days since taking office, Aso returned straight to his private residence only four days, including the day he took office. Excluding his overseas travel and dinner with the Emperor and Empress, he went to 32 eating and drinking establishments in 21 days in Tokyo. Of the 21 days, he went to both a restaurant and a bar 10 days.

(8) Aso diplomacy has failed

SHUKAN ASAHI (WEEKLY ASAHI) (Abridged slightly)

October 31, 2008

By Takashi Uesugi, journalist

Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) Asian and Oceanian Affairs Bureau Director-General Akitaka Saiki is known as a hard-liner on North Korea and is also regarded as one of the star diplomats because of his gallant appearance. He normally does not make comments

antagonizing the media. What was in the article that prompted Saiki to show strong emotions toward reporters?

Before a group of reporters covering MOFA, allegedly assembled for an off-the-record session, Saiki said furiously: "Don't kid me! Japan received a phone call directly from President Bush. Don't write fake articles!" One of the attendants later said. "Mr. Saiki was angry at Asahi and Yomiuri articles."

The headlines of the Asahi Shimbun and Yomiuri Shimbun articles that enraged the star MOFA bureau chief read:

"Japan kept out of the loop -- A shock" (Asahi Oct. 12 morning edition)

"Defeat of Japanese diplomacy" (Yomiuri Oct. 13 morning edition)

In June, the United States announced that it would remove North Korea from its list of terrorism-sponsoring nations. The North had been on the list since 1988. In reaction, the Japanese government continued urging the United States not to delist the North.

For Japan, which is saddled with the abduction issue, to see the United States, its ally, making concessions to North Korea has been nothing but a nightmare. It would be a repetition of the nightmare eight years ago.

In 2000, then Secretary of State Madeline Albright visited North Korea and as a result, the antagonistic relationship between North Korea and the United States eased. But that was only part of the desperate effort of the Clinton administration in a lame duck stage to score points on the diplomatic front.

As expected, the United States was eventually duped by North Korean leader Kim Jong Il and ended up allowing the North to pursue a nuclear development program.

The Japanese government, including Prime Minister Taro Aso, has been giving consideration, possibly too much, to the United States so as not to see the same nightmare repeated.

But the nightmare soon became a reality. On Saturday, October 11, Prime Minister Aso was attending a Japan Junior Chamber of Commerce meeting in Hamamatsu City, Shizuoka Prefecture. At one point, Aso had to excuse himself from the meeting to rush into another room. The prime minister there had an emergency telephone conversation with President George W. Bush. It was clear from the fact that the prime minister was not accompanied by a MOFA secretary that the telephone conversation was abruptly scheduled at 23:20 that day.

President Bush told Prime Minister Aso on the phone that the United States would remove the North from its terrorism blacklist in 30 minutes. That was a real bolt out of the blue.

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The day before, on Oct. 10, Chief Cabinet Secretary Takeo Kawamura made the following comment in an impromptu interview: "The government has not received any formal notice from the United States that it would delist the North as a state sponsor of terrorism before the end of October."

Foreign Minister Hirofumi Nakasone, too, emphatically stated after a telephone conversation with Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice on the same day that the delisting would not occur on the weekend, exposing confidence in the Japan-U.S. alliance.

In reality, such U.S. news companies as AP and the New York Times had reported for days that the delisting would occur before long.

But the Japanese government treated them as erroneous reports and did not take them seriously. Behind that lies the Japanese government's one-sided love of the United States and groundless confidence.

Prime Minister Aso defended the United States, while criticizing the

major opposition Democratic Party of Japan. He said in his policy speech: "We hear statements from various senior members of the DPJ that Japan should shift the pivot of its diplomacy from the Japan-U.S. alliance to the United Nations. I believe that the importance of the Japan-U.S. alliance for the security of Japan and its people remains totally unchanged. (omitted) The Japan-U.S. alliance and the UN-which should take precedence over the other? I believe the DPJ has the responsibility to make its position clear to the Japanese public and the world." Despite such a demonstration of allegiance to the United States, Japan's "love," America, has treated Tokyo coldly.

As a romance does not result in a happy ending with a sense of honesty alone, diplomacy does not bear fruit with genuine feelings alone. A senior MOFA official, while admitting a strategic mistake, explained the government's inaccurate understanding of the United States this way: "In view of Japan's contributions to the war on terror in the form of refueling legislation and support for the U.S. financial crisis, it was true that the government had a lax view that the United States would not ignore Japan's wishes. There was a changeover of the prime minister at a critical time, and the political vacuum hurt."

The United States' response to South Korea was another nightmare for Japan. A government official noted: "Japan received the notice 30 minutes before (the delisting), while South Korea was informed a day before (the delisting). The truth seems that Japan's reaction was so subdued that the United States forgot to notify it."

Is it really possible to forget about Japan?

Tokyo's reaction was, while the U.S. media repeatedly reported on the forthcoming delisting and Seoul made many inquiries to Washington. Shortly before the delisting, a meeting was held at Kantei (Prime Minister's Official Residence) attended by Prime Minister Aso. There Chief Cabinet Secretary Kawamura reportedly said: "I believe President Bush did not directly say that. Only low-level government officials are saying that, and chances are high that people of such a level are saying that arbitrarily. Assistant Secretary Hill has taken steps because he just wants to take credit."

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Foreign Minister Nakasone's incompetence stands out

Why does the government not realize that this kind of arrogance and poor awareness of the situation always results in the defeat of Japanese diplomacy?

Finance Minister and Financial Services Minister Shoichi Nakagawa, who visited the United States to attend the latest G-7 meeting of finance ministers and central bank governors, asked Secretary of State Rice not to delist the North. His request on the improper occasion incurred Rice's displeasure.

Foreign Minister Nakasone, too, seems to have failed to read the sign when he held a telephone conversation with Secretary Rice.

A senior MOFA official commented: "A cabinet minister as incompetent as Foreign Minister Nakasone is rare. Government officials always have to repeat their lectures many times over and he still does not understand. He is helpless. Just riding on his father's coattail, he has never spoken using words of his own. It was just not possible for him to get the message across in his talks with Rice."

An aforementioned government official also noted: "The United States thinks it informed Japan, but Japan does not think it received expiation. The telephone conversation with Bush lasted only 10 minutes. Excluding the interpretation, they discussed the matter only for five minutes or so. Whether (Prime Minister Aso) was able to convey Japan's discontent to the United States in that short conversation is questionable."

Prime ministers Shinzo Abe and Yasuo Fukuda abruptly walked off the job and created political vacuums. Japan's international credibility

is in ruins.

The sudden disappearance of the chair of the G-8 summit from the season of major diplomatic events, such as the UN General Assembly, deserved to lose the credibility of the global community. An American news agency Tokyo office reporter said matter-of-factly: "It has hardly been reported in Japan, but no country in the world, not to mention the Group of Seven, now expects Japan to take the initiative in any area. Harboring the wrong idea, Japan seems to be trying to become a world leader, but no country is expecting anything of Japan and they really don't want to see Japan do anything unnecessary."

To begin with, the United States designated terrorism-sponsoring countries based on its own law. The optimism and weakness of Japan's foreign policy that fluctuates between hope and despair and is easily affected by the delisting of such a country are helpless.

The Aso administration holds optimistic views about the United States. Regardless of Japan's efforts to pass the refueling law, buy U.S. bonds, and play up the importance of the Japan-U.S. alliance, the United States still forgot about Japan.

Japanese diplomacy has not failed; it simply does not exist.

SCHIEFFER